



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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Individual Blood Lead Level Test Results Sent to Study Participants
Preliminary Report on Effects of Consuming Lead Bullet Fragments
Expected Within Four to Six Weeks

BISMARCK, N.D. – Individual blood lead level test results have been sent to participants of a study conducted by the North Dakota Department of Health and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in late May and early June 2008, according to Stephen Pickard, M.D., epidemiologist with the North Dakota Department of Health.

The study was designed to determine whether people who eat wild game harvested with lead bullets have higher blood lead levels than people who don't. A total of 738 North Dakotans volunteered to have their blood tested for the presence of lead. Within the next two weeks, each participant will receive a letter with his or her blood lead level, as well as information to help participants interpret the results and a phone number to call if they have questions.

Although a high percentage of people who were tested had lead in their blood, none had levels higher than 10. A lead level of zero is preferred for health reasons, but it is not unusual to see lead levels of up to 2 in people across the United States.

“This information, in and of itself, does not confirm the presence or absence of risk associated with eating wild game harvested with lead bullets,” Pickard said. “Instead, the part of the study that will answer that question should be available within four to six weeks, once the CDC has analyzed the data collected from the participants. At that time we should have a better understanding of the relationship between the consumption of lead bullet fragments and the level of lead in a person's blood.”

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In late March 2008, the North Dakota departments of Health, Agriculture, and Game and Fish advised food pantries across the state not to distribute or use donated ground venison because of the discovery of contamination with lead fragments. A few weeks later, the Minnesota departments of Health, Agriculture and Natural Resources made a similar advisory after laboratory tests discovered lead in venison that had been donated to food pantries in Minnesota. At that time, the North Dakota Department of Health asked the CDC for assistance in conducting the blood lead level study.

“Although no single study is definitive, the results of this study are expected to provide an estimate of the risk to health of eating wild game that has been taken with lead bullets,” Pickard said. “The results of this study and other studies ongoing in other states should help us develop more definitive recommendations to hunters about the safety of consuming wild game for themselves and for their families and the best ways to minimize any risk. As we have said before, people who have concerns about the possibility of lead fragments in their wild game should not serve it to children and may decide whether to eat it themselves.”

Blood lead levels higher than 10 micrograms per deciliter for children and 25 micrograms per deciliter for adults are considered elevated. However, even levels below 10 can cause health problems, including high blood pressure and reduced kidney function among adults and permanent brain injury among infants and preschool children. For children ages 6 and younger, any exposure to lead is considered too much:

- In young children, lead exposure can cause lower IQs, learning disabilities, stunted growth, kidney damage, attention deficit disorder (ADD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).
- In pregnant women, high lead exposure can cause low birth-weight babies, premature births, miscarriage and stillbirth.
- In adults, lead can cause high blood pressure, hearing loss and infertility.

Other information related to the lead-in-venison issue includes the following:

- According to Ann Pollert, Community Action Partnership director, the program is waiting for the CDC preliminary report before deciding whether gun-shot venison will be donated to food pantries this year through the Sportsmen Against Hunger Program.
- The North Dakota Department of Agriculture has sent guidelines to processors concerning ways to minimize the risk of lead in processed meat, including venison.
- The North Dakota Game and Fish Department included an article in its latest issue of its North Dakota Outdoors magazine concerning the lead-in-venison issue and hunting.

More information about the lead-in-venison issue, including the documents referenced above, is available on the North Dakota Department of Health’s website at www.ndhealth.gov/lead/venison.

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